

UW Health: Local partnership strives to prevent violent injuries

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MADISON, Wis. – On National Injury Prevention Day, UW Health is shining a light on prevention of violent injuries, particularly from firearms.

In 2019, UW Health's Level I Adult Trauma Center treated 85 patients for injuries related to violence, of which 23 were firearm related. In 2020, those numbers jumped to 120 patients with injuries from violence; 42 were firearm related. As of June 30, 2021, those numbers were on pace to match 2020.

The UW Health Level I Trauma Center works closely with dozens of local community partners that are experts in injury prevention, and UW Health participates in hundreds of boards, councils, commissions and efforts to prevent and reduce harm from falls and vehicle and bicycle crashes. But one type of injury is especially tragic – firearm wounds, according to Dr. Ann O'Rourke, medical director of the Adult Trauma Center, UW Health.

“Patients who have been injured with firearms are at very high risk for experiencing future violence, and the acute psychological trauma for the patient oftentimes interferes with care and healing,” she said. “The acute trauma is experienced not just by the patient, but also their family members and friends.”

One such partnership is with Focused Interruption. The organization, founded in 2016, works with UW Health to ensure culturally proficient services for patients and family members beginning in the emergency room and trauma center and continuing with community-based intensive case management.

Focused Interruption works to help mitigate the effects of trauma by providing support for patients and their families, according to Anthony Cooper, founder and

chief executive officer, Focused Interruption.

UW Health's partnership makes it possible for Focused Interruption to have people with lived experience connect with patients and their family members and friends, he said.

"We are able to be present at a time when patients most need support and resources for healing and preventing future victimization," Cooper said. "This can make a world of difference for those threatened by violence, and it works because we have the trust of the community and the hospital."

Continually ranked in the top 50 hospitals in the country, and No. 1 in Wisconsin, UW Health's Level 1 Trauma Center will provide extraordinary care if a patient is injured, but it is certainly better to prevent the injury in the first place, O'Rourke said.

"We can provide the highest quality care no matter what the injury, but we'd rather a patient never meets us because the injury was prevented," she said.

O'Rourke and Cooper are available for interviews today, and a recorded interview with O'Rourke is also available.